

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 5 part II

17 October 1985

# Israel Is Glad to Have an Ally Against Terror

By ZEV SCHIFF

TEL AVIV—Washington has journeyed a long way since August, 1973, when the U.N. Security Council, with full U.S. support, condemned Israel for intercepting a Middle East Airlines plane and forcing it to land in Israel. Israeli intelligence had been informed that among the passengers was George Habash, leader of the Palestinian Popular Liberation Front, who was responsible for hundreds of terrorist acts and the deaths of many innocent people. Habash was not caught, and Israel felt itself to be in isolation in its struggle against international terror.

There is, consequently, enormous satisfaction in Israel over the interception of the Egyptian aircraft by American fighter planes in a bid to bring to justice the four hijacker-killers. Washington has made a decisive move in its fight against terror. At long last it has joined the lamentably small club of nations not content to use words as their only weapon against international terror.

Israeli military and terrorism experts are extremely complimentary about the American operation and those who executed it. One small mistake would have disrupted the entire operation.

Washington had a relative bargain compared with the numerous Israeli operations against terrorist organizations. Washington had the opportunity of flexing its muscles without opening fire or spilling blood, and the benefit of doing so in international airspace, not over foreign territory.

But the operation was not without problems in other respects. It was politically difficult for the United States to intercept an aircraft of a friendly country with whom it is anxious to maintain good relations. To weaken President Hosni Mubarak's position at home, when he is facing pressure from the political opposition and waves of fundamentalist protest, is neither in Washington's nor in Israel's interest. Egypt has been put in a most embarrassing position, though for the most part, Mubarak has only himself to blame.

The interception episode also demonstrated that in international terror, the most traditional Western partners dare not to cooperate fully.

Italy was forced to accept and jail the four killer-hijackers—but it hurriedly released the men who masterminded the operation. Italy thus became an indirect partner in this organization's reign of terror, including that directed against Italian citizens.

This is not the first time that Italy has acted this way toward killers who have

turned the country, and especially Rome's international airport, into the scene of murder. The government's acquiescence in this instance lies in its wish to maintain good relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and in its fear that the Palestinians might assist the Red Brigades in Italy.

Earlier, the socialist government of Greece also was quick to release Arab terrorists.

In the war against terror, the United States and Israel have only two genuine partners in the European community—West Germany and Great Britain. France is prepared to cooperate, but Paris can also spring surprises.

In the Middle East, Israel is America's one and only genuine partner in the war against international terror. Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan pay generous lip service to the war against terror, but in deed they come up short. Egypt worked to put an end to the hijacking of the Italian liner, but promised Yasser Arafat that it would release the hijackers. Only heavy Israeli pressure on the Jordanians drove Amman to warn leading Palestinians against terrorist acts and hold them in check.

The interception of the aircraft with the four terrorists may be, as far as America is concerned, the beginning of a new chapter. It is hoped that the United States now will understand that in the struggle with this sort of plague, sterile and defensive operations will not always do.

Israel, of course, understands that Washington is not at liberty to do whatever Israel does in its war against terror. What Israel expects of Washington today is true cooperation in the effort, encompassing all branches of American intelligence, including covert operations, and support of such operations when performed by others. Israel also expects firm U.S. support in international organizations and countries with whom it has no diplomatic ties, when it concerns the fight against terror.

At the same time, it must be borne in mind that war against terror, however important, cannot be a substitute for the Middle East peace process. There are Palestinians who perpetuate acts of terror to wreck the peace process, but there also are Israelis who use that as an excuse not to join it.

The question is: how to conduct the peace process without losing heart despite the terror.

*Zev Schiff is defense editor of the Israeli daily, Haaretz.*